

A GENE BANK FOR CASPIANS

The Caspian Horse is already amongst the rarest of creatures, having been known to the modern world for just 50 years after apparent extinction. Its importance to the equine species as the probable ancestor of most of today's hot-blooded breeds has already been established. We must now protect this unique horse from deterioration by inbreeding, to keep the breed in good shape for future generations, as their re-discoverer, Louise Firouz, would have expected.

The good news is that the Caspian now exists in several parts of the world, thanks to early exports from Iran and the UK within the first 30 years of its 'new' life. Ideally, geographically separated breeders should have access to different bloodlines and share their own with others, to prevent stagnation and in-breeding. The aim is to provide them with a choice of new bloodlines via Artificial Insemination (AI), so that all Caspians, wherever they are, are bred to the Breed Standard devised by their re-discoverer - Louise Firouz.

The inter-dependence of breeders is one of several important reasons why the CHS is collecting funds to set-up a Gene (or Sperm) Bank, starting with the rarest and most under-used bloodlines when we have the funds available.

But we don't have forever. To put it plainly - the Gene Bank needs to be established before some of these rare bloodlines begin to fade from existence.

Strong focus on new bloodlines at the International Conference

Another stimulus is the potential supply of excellent new bloodlines from Iran, when reciprocal arrangements can be made for the exchange and transport of frozen semen into and out of Iran.

A good part of the 4th International Caspian Conference held in Iran in September 2015 dealt with the vital need to preserve the Caspian for many reasons. Artificial Insemination (AI) was the topic of several research papers and presentations, covering the genetic specialities of the Caspian which should be preserved and the processes involved. It is considered essential for the genetic health of the Caspian breed that AI becomes not only an acceptable way to maintain a wide genetic base, but that it should obtain the expertise and funds required to make it an accessible facility in the relatively near future.

Although currently few, we're told there are already good facilities there for collection, testing, storage and insemination. Following the strong interest expressed at the Conference and the desire of Iranian breeders to work with the ICS in the preservation of their national breed, we hope that AI for Caspians between Iran and other countries will soon be possible on a wider scale. For further information please visit the 4TH International Conference page on this website.

Equine Artificial Insemination – the facts

The freezing of viable equine semen for AI used to be a rather hit and miss affair. These days, thanks to pioneering work by CHS President, Jane Holderness-Roddam and CHS Vice-President, Elizabeth Mansfield-Parnell, equine AI has become far more reliable. Stallion Centres like the West Kington Stallion Centre have established effective procedures for collection, testing and storing semen and handle the paperwork and logistics required to transfer it in good condition to most parts of the world. They, and similar centres, also advise on the selection, preparation and treatment of suitable recipient mares.

Before that stage though, semen must be collected from stallions chosen for correct equine conformation, bloodlines and breed excellence. Not all stallions will co-operate in the collection and of those that do, their semen may be of insufficient quantity and quality for processing. Those that pass this stage may still be eliminated if their sperm does not survive freezing, storage and thawing and it will obviously rely greatly on the goodwill and co-operation of stallion owners. It is easy to see why this can be a costly business, but also reassuring to know that many horses do pass the test and go on to sire viable foals by AI these days.

The International Caspian Stud Book rules permit AI and allow pure-bred registration according to strict criteria, which require the ICS and national member societies to be notified before insemination, after foaling and at registration of the foal.

The likely costs

For European distribution, costs are likely to be in the region of £5000 to test two stallions, which would cover livery, collection, processing and tests to the standard required by the EU. It's likely to cost around £2,000 more for World-wide suitability. We would aim to test two or three stallions simultaneously if possible, but as not all may be suitable, replacements would also have to be on stand-by.

CHS Council hopes that this project will save and store sperm from as many bloodlines as possible, so we predict that there will be an on-going need for further funds after the initial testing stages.

CHS has already started to raise the funds required – our total so far is £3,045.00, thanks to donations and legacies from generous individuals. It is also proposed that CHS should pay into the Gene Bank Fund some of the funds saved by emailing the magazine to members instead of printing and posting it. You can help us to meet this target if like us, you are concerned about keeping the breed strong.

The sooner the money is raised, the sooner we can start the programme, before bloodlines are lost.

How members of CHS and friends of Caspians can help!

There are so many effective ways in which you can work with us to reach our goal! Please click on the links given below to see which ones appeal to you or think up your own ideas. We will regularly update the total so that we can all see what a difference our efforts are making. (When making a donation, please state that it is intended for the Gene Bank Fund - thank you.)

- **Donate** – Please click on the '**Donate**' button at the bottom of each page to make your donation by PayPal. (You can arrange a Standing Order if you wish to give regularly).
- **Leave a Legacy** - Please click [here](#) for a form of wording to include in your Will.
- **Buy a unique 50th Anniversary Calendar** – Click [here](#) to order your own copy of this fabulous collection of photographs produced by Colin Barker and Farokh Khorooshi. **Profits from Calendar sales will go towards the Gene Bank Fund.**
- **Fund-raise** – There are at least 100 entertaining ways to raise funds! Please click [here](#) to see them and choose one that looks fun to do! Maybe you can think of others? Let us know and we'll add them to the list.
- **Recruit more members to CHS** – Please click [here](#) to link to our membership form. Print it out so that you have a form ready in your pocket when talking to sympathetic friends! The more members we have, the quicker we can reach our target.

Our total so far:

Our Gene Bank Fund currently stands at £3,045.00, so there's a bit to go to reach Stage 1 – the testing of up to three stallions. We will update you from time to time on progress.

Thank you for reading this and thank you, on behalf of the Caspians, for anything you can spare towards setting up the Caspian Gene Bank.